

Message Text

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DRAFTED BY S/FW-COA:RTLEROY/COMMERCE:NOAA:HALLMAN

APPROVED BY S/FW-COA:SBLOW

ARA/CAR-MR. HIGH

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R 172252Z MAY 74

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY NASSAU

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E.O. 11652:NA

TAGS: EFIS TBIO BF

SUBJECT: CONSERVATION OF BLUEFIN TUNA

1. THE UNITED STATES IS SEEKING THE SUPPORT OF OTHER COUNTRIES FOR A CONSERVATION PROGRAM FOR THE NORTH ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA RESOURCE, WHICH FISHERY MANAGEMENT EXPERTS BELIEVE IS THREATENED WITH SERIOUS DEPLETION. THE BLUEFIN TUNA GROWS TO A VERY LARGE SIZE, SOME TO APPROXIMATELY 1,000 POUNDS, AND SUPPORTS A VARIETY OF FISHERIES, INCLUDING MAJOR RECREATIONAL FISHERIES. THE RECREATIONAL FISHERY IS AIMED ESPECIALLY AT THE LARGE BLUEFIN TUNA. THE LARGE BLUEFIN, HOWEVER, ARE ESSENTIAL TO PROVIDE BROOD STOCKS FOR SPAWNING PURPOSES. THUS, ONE CONSERVATION MEASURE WHICH IS NECESSARY TO PROTECT FUTURE BLUEFIN STOCKS INVOLVES MINIMIZING THE KILLING OF LARGE BLUEFIN TUNA.

2. THE RECREATIONAL CATCH OF ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA OFF THE BAHAMAS IS TAKEN PRIMARILY DURING TOURNAMENTS, THREE OF WHICH WERE HELD IN 1973 AND TWO OF WHICH ARE PLANNED FOR 1974. THESE TOURNAMENTS ARE ANNUAL AFFAIRS OCCURRING MAY/JUNE (E.G. BIMINI TUNA TOURNAMENT, CAT CAY TUNA TOUR.) RUN BY U.S. CITIZENS, AND CONSIDERABLE INTEREST HAS DEVELOPED

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AMONG MANY U.S. SPORTFISHING ORGANIZATIONS IN CONDUCTING

THEM ON A TAG AND RELEASE BASIS, AVOIDING THE KILLING OF THE FISH INSOFAR AS POSSIBLE. (GIANT BLUEFIN ANGLING TOURNAMENTS IN THE U.S. AND CANADA ARE INCREASINGLY BEING CONDUCTED ON A TAG AND RELEASE BASIS.)

3. WE HAVE RECEIVED REPORTS OF STATEMENTS ATTRIBUTED TO THE BAHAMIAN MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES AND THE COMMISSIONER ON BIMINI CALLING FOR THE CONTINUED LANDING OF ANY BLUEFIN CAUGHT IN TOURNAMENTS FOR LOCAL CONSUMPTION, AS WAS DONE IN THE PAST. THEY ARE SAID TO HAVE EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FISH IN SUPPLYING PROTEIN TO LOCAL RESIDENTS.

4. WHILE THESE STATEMENTS HAVE NOT BEEN VERIFIED, IT SEEMS IMPORTANT TO MAKE THE BAHAMIAN GOVERNMENT AWARE OF THE REASONS WE ARE MAKING SPECIAL EFFORTS TO CONSERVE BLUEFIN TUNA. WE RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE THESE FISH HAVE BOTH FROM THE STANDPOINT OF PROMOTING TOURISM AND IN SUPPLYING PROTEIN FOR LOCAL CONSUMPTION IN THE BAHAMAS. THUS, IT IS ONLY BECAUSE OF THE ESSENTIAL NEED TO INSURE THE LONG-TERM AVAILABILITY OF THESE FISH OFF THE BAHAMAS THAT SPECIAL CONSERVATION MEASURES ARE BEING PROPOSED FOR THE PRESENT.

5. ACCORDINGLY, THE EMBASSY IS REQUESTED TO CONVEY U.S. CONCERN OVER THE CONSERVATION OF BLUEFIN TUNA TO THE APPROPRIATE BAHAMIAN OFFICIALS AND TO SEEK THEIR SUPPORT FOR RESTRICTING THE KILLING OF LARGE BLUEFIN TUNA SO THAT THE RESOURCE CAN BE PRESERVED TO SUPPORT FISHERIES IN THE FUTURE. THE EMBASSY, IN ITS APPROACH, MAY DRAW UPON THE FOLLOWING:

(A) A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES, INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT), HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY CONCERNED OVER THE STATUS OF THE STOCKS OF NORTHERN ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA. THE UNITED STATES FORMALLY EXPRESSED ITS CONCERN AT A DECEMBER 1973 ICCAT MEETING, SUGGESTING THAT INDIVIDUAL GOVERNMENTS CONSIDER VARIOUS REGULATORY MEASURES TO PROTECT THESE FISH. INCLUDED IN THE U.S. STATEMENT WAS THE FOLLOWING:

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"THE UNITED STATES IS CONCERNED OVER THE CAPTURE OF LARGE BLUEFIN AND NOTES THAT THE SCRS (STANDING COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND STATISTICS) HAS REPORTED ON THE APPARENT VERY LOW LEVEL OF THESE FISH, SUGGESTING THAT ANY FURTHER DE-

CLINE MAY WELL AFFECT RECRUITMENT. SINCE THE INTENSIVE EXPLOITATION OF THE REMAINING LARGE FISH MAY REDUCE SIGNI-

FICANTLY THE SPAWNING STOCK, THE UNITED STATES URGES ALL MEMBER COUNTRIES TO MAKE EVERY FEASIBLE EFFORT TO REDUCE THE CAPTURE OF LARGE BLUEFIN TUNA."

(B) THE UNITED STATES IS UNDERTAKING AN EXPANDED RESEARCH PROGRAM WITH A VIEW TOWARD INSTITUTING A COMPREHENSIVE BLUEFIN TUNA MANAGEMENT PLAN WHICH MAY RESULT IN SUCH CONSERVATION MEASURES AS A MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT, QUOTAS, OR OTHER MEASURES. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WILL ALSO BE URGING U.S. RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL FISHERMEN TO AVOID THE CAPTURE OF LARGE BLUEFIN.

(C) THE UNITED STATES IS PLANNING CONSULTATIONS WITH CANADA, WHICH HAS A SIGNIFICANT BLUEFIN FISHERY, IN AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE PROTECTION OF BLUEFIN STOCKS THROUGH JOINT CONSERVATION EFFORTS.

6. EMBASSY DISCUSSIONS WITH BAHAMIAN OFFICIALS SHOULD INCLUDE THE PERMANENT SECRETARY OF THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES (ORRIS RUSSEL) AND OTHER OFFICIALS CONCERNED WITH FISHERIES AND TOURISM, AS THE EMBASSY MAY DEEM APPROPRIATE. DISCUSSIONS SHOULD NOTE THAT IT IS NOT THE DESIRE OF THE UNITED STATES TO ELIMINATE THESE TOURNAMENTS, WHICH ARE RECOGNIZED AS BEING OF INTEREST TO U.S. RECREATIONAL FISHERMEN AND TO THE BAHAMAS. THE UNITED STATES AT THIS TIME SEEKS, RATHER, COOPERATION IN THE FORM OF TAG AND RELEASE TOURNAMENTS. THIS WILL SERVE TO PROTECT THE BLUEFIN TUNA RESOURCE SO THAT IT CAN BE REBUILT TO A POINT WHERE IT MAY ONCE AGAIN SUPPORT AN EXPANDED FISHERY.

7. PLEASE KEEP US INFORMED OF YOUR EFFORTS IN THIS MATTER. RUSH
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